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ABSTRACT

Freedom in the classroom should concern the schools as much as the development of cognition and skills. Freedom has traditionally been regarded as something that the child already possesses or which will develop by itself. However, freedom is not a naturally developing property of man, but a delicate and fragile quality of mind and behavior which must be recognized and encouraged by the schools. Relational patterns of perceiving and behaving which describe how three different types of children relate to the classroom environment are: survival, adjustment, and encounter. The most immature and closed pattern is that of survival in which the child regards the world as a dangerous place and wishes to keep change to a minimum. The adjustment pattern typifies the child who first discovers what others expect of him and then produces the desired behavior. Change is tolerated if sanctioned by authority. The pattern of encountering is the most mature and is seen in the child who is able to tolerate uncertainty, can postpone gratification, is curious and receptive to his environment, and is not afraid to express emotions. Components and antecedents of freedom, and their significance for the teacher in helping all three types of children achieve freedom in the classroom, are discussed. [Filmed from best available copy.] (NH)

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# FREEDOM IN THE CLASSROOM

Faculty Lecture Presented By

Steven Harlow

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1970-71 Faculty Lecture Series

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## I. INTRODUCTION

I hope tonight to bring for your consideration a number of concerns and thoughts I have on the concept of practice of freedom in the context of the classroom. Friends and former students know that I am far from an organized creature. And if tonight you will allow me to follow the bent of my personality and let me wander and move in and about the topic without a tight and sequential organization, I will be in your debt.

It is far from agreed upon that freedom should be the concern of the schools. A very strong case can be built for the task of the schools being ultimately concerned with the imparting of knowledge and the developing of skills and competencies. Or as an institution of socialization - as Robert Dreeben (1968) has advocated - where the primary focus is teaching for the understanding and acceptance of rules and norms.

In these concepts of education freedom is thought of as something that either the child already possesses - and therefore does not need further nurturing by the schools - or as a quality that will naturally emerge later (perhaps at commencement time). Freedom is for outside the school or for later, but not for the school.

I take an opposite view, I do not hold that freedom is a naturally developing property of man. Nor is it simply a matter of taking obstacles and restraints out of the path of the individual. Rather, I hold that freedom is a delicate and fragile quality of mind and behavior which has to be recognized, valued, and encouraged by our schools. It would seem to me that a nation which espouses democratic ideals would find it necessary to prepare it's children to live as democrats. And that it's schools would treat the fostering of freedom not as something outside it's boundries of concern, but as a primary responsibility.

The old argument of whether the schools owe their primary allegiance to the individual or to society vanishes if we place it within the framework of preparing the individual for living in a democratic society. Then our task as teachers becomes that of encouraging free, humane, and actualizing individuals who by these qualities strengthen the fibers of society. No choice of allegiance is necessary. The encouragement of a free, aware, socially sensitive individual at the same time serves the democratic community.

I would like now to briefly mention the way in which I wish to approach our discussion of freedom in the classroom. I would first like to bring to your attention the three types of relational patterns which are exhibited by children in the classroom. Among other reasons, I do this to demonstrate that as we encourage freedom not all children can be approached in the same way. Next we will view the definitional components of freedom as well as the preconditions of freedom and their consequences. Finally we will view the role of knowledge, thought, and imagination in relation to the facilitation of freedom. Collateral with all of this I will attempt to present the orientation of the concerned teacher as he meets with the child.

The capacity of the child to share in the direction of his learning and his life, and the school's responsibility in encouraging this process is what we shall be discussing tonight.

## II. RELATIONAL PATTERNS

It might be helpful to begin with an examination of three general ways in which children relate to the situations, persons and things in their classroom environment. These ways of perceiving and behaving are called relational patterns. The three relational patterns that will be described characterize three corresponding types of children: the survivor, the adjuster, and the encounterer. They differ in their openness to experience, their ability to live independently, their maturity, and their capacity to operate freely.

The most immature and least open of the relational patterns is that of survival. A child operating at the survival level is concerned with merely getting through time and space without disturbing his established ways of satisfying needs. For whatever reason - perhaps he has learned that his environment is a dangerous and painful place, or can not by his efforts be mastered - the child wishes to keep things constant and reduce the amount of change in his world. Accordingly, his behavior is extremely sterotyped and rigid. When he confronts a new situation he will ignore its special demands and treat it as if it were no different than previous situations. When problems arise he attempts to meet them by responding with generally inappropriate behavior (he may, for example, lash out with tamtrums or withdraw completely or exhibit extreme impulsiveness). To the observer it would appear that such behavior is self-defeating - and it is - but it serves the function of not having the child involve and open himself up to something that may be overwhelming and painful. The seeming advantage of the survival pattern is safety through predicability and reduction of uncertainty. Its disadvantages are obvious. The individual does not grow, he is unable to

appreciate the uniqueness of those he meets, he has not permitted himself to learn better ways of coping with his environment, and he is bound to the immediate satisfaction of basic needs. The net effect is he is not free. We will return to this point later.

The second relational [illegible] the child is less preoccupied with [illegible] others. The adjuster's concern is that of learning what is expected of him by others and then producing corresponding behavior. His sensitivity to a reference group's norms and expectations reminds one of David Reisman's "other - directed" individual. His reinforcements and rewards come from the response of others to his behavior. While the adjuster is not fearful of change, as was true of the survivor, awareness of change and novelty is controlled. New ways of thinking and behaving are first sanctioned by an authority or reference group, and then they are introduced to the individual. Th[illegible] insuring a slow flow of acceptable change. As a result he experiences very few things first hand. The picture of the adjuster that is emerging is one of a child vitally concerned with the "right way". He is intolerant of divergence from the perceived correct ways of behaving, thinking, and valuing.

The advantages of thi[illegible] pattern over the survival [illegible]attern are apparent. There is less rigidity, more awareness, more sensitivity to the needs of others. Yet the limitations of the adjuster are striking. Though he may believe otherwise, he is not directing his own life. He is not responsive to the uniqueness of individuals who represent different ways of living. He is not open to entertain divergent possibilities residing within himself. To this extent he is less than free.

The relational pattern of greatest maturity - and I might add maturity has little to do with chronological age - is that of the encounterer. Many educators and psychologists (among them Aaron Stern, Abraham Maslow, and John Holt) have described the individual operating at this level. Aaron Stern (1970) characterizes him as one who can live with uncertainty. The effect of being able to live with uncertainty is explained by Stern in this way: "it means you have a capacity to express feelings and emotionality. If you need to be certain, if you must always have your behavior, structured and controlled, then you must restrict yourself to the areas of human functioning that are controllable and can be practiced, such as intellectual exercises. Feelings cannot be controlled."

Another trait of the encounterer is his ability to postpone immediate gratification in the service of long range goals. We are now referring to the power of the individual to surrender a present enjoyment for preparation that will yield a more important future meaning; and of being able to discern the relationship of the present to the future. In effect a thinking as well as a feeling human being.

John Holt (1969) depicts the encounterer as a child who "wants to make sense out of things, find out how things work, gain competence and control over himself and his environment". Holt then goes on to say, "He is open, receptive, and perceptive. He does not shut himself off from the strange, confused, and complicated world around him. He observes it closely and sharply, and tries to take it all in. He is experimental. . . he wants to find out how reality works, and he works on it. He is bold. He is not afraid of making mistakes. And he

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is patient. He can tolerate an extraordinary amount of uncertainty, confusion, ignorance, and suspense. He does not live to have instant meaning in any new situation. He is willing and able to wait for meaning to come to him - even if it comes very slowly, which it usually does."

Of the three relational patterns - survival, adjustment, encounter- the encounter represents the greatest freedom, and also the most social sensitivity.

For the encounterer, freedom springs from encouragement of the very traits he brings into the school situation. For the adjuster whose locus of concern is the right way - accepting judgments and decisions from others - freedom is nurtured by providing greater areas of self-direction. For the survivor, freedom comes only after the child learns with the support of the teacher that life is not overpowering and painful - that he can venture forth and be successful.

After viewing these relational patterns a question should be asked: Where are we as teachers at? It has been my experience and observation that the schools have almost exclusively fixed upon and promoted the adjustment pattern. Teachers expect their students to accept the given ways of behaving and knowing. As Dreeben (1968) in his interesting book <u>On What Is Learned In Schools</u> directly puts it: "To the question of what is learned in school (I answer) pupils learn to accept principles of conduct or social norms, and to act according to them." Some children learn this kind of thing better than others. The survivors are hard to reach, difficult on the teacher, difficult on the class. They become school problems. They become special students. They are not the best of learners.

Neither, however are they encounterers. Their independence of mind and spirit make them question those principles of conduct and norms, to which Dreeben refers, as to some greater personal meaning. Let me say again they are not the best of learners. Torrance, Yomomoto, Getzels and Jackson among others have found that the child who exhibits independent and creative learning behavior is generally castigated and isolated by his classmates, and viewed as bothersome by his teachers.

Along these lines, a piece of research was done by Wallach and Kogan (1965). They studied an entire population of fifth graders in a large suburan school district. After assessing creativity and intelligence they divided their sample into four groups: high intelligence - high creativity, high intelligence - low creativity, low intelligence - high creativity, and low intelligence - low creativity. They then viewed the relative anxiety levels of each group. They found, not too surprisingly, that the low intelligence - low creativity group exhibited the highest anxiety scores, while - and this may be surprising - the lowest degree of anxiety was found in the high intelligence - low creativity group.

Why would those who are high in intelligence and low in creativity be less anxious than those who are high in both intelligence and creativity? Wallace (1971) offers this hypothesis: "They (the high IQ - low creativity group) possess sufficient intelligence to cope adequately with the demands of their teachers. More importantly, their low creativity is not an undersirable attribute in the typical elementary classroom where conformance of thought rather than modification of thought is usually rewarded".

How very sad that we are penalizing students who present the very learning and personal qualities that we should be encouraging.

We must realize that if important progress is to come in education it will not be in the domain of more efficient learning of skills or the imparting of greater amounts of information, but rather in the nurturance of the humanistic and democratic qualities such as those exhibited by the encounterer type.

## III. COMPONENTS OF FREEDOM

Let us now turn our attention to the components of freedom. If we for the moment define freedom as simply the capacity to actualize choices it seems to me two components emerge as important. First, and most significant, freedom rests upon belief and attitude. The individual's belief that he can make choices; that every situation presents the opportunity for choice; that he can do something about a situation, if only to frame an attitude toward it. In this vein Rollo May (1969) cites Merileau-Ponty as saying "every intention is an attention, and attention is I - can." Without this belief that he can make choices the individual can not and will not make them. Things will happen to him. Events will occur. But he will not see the voluntary that inheres in each situation.

The second component of freedom - along with the willingness to choose - consists of the means and competencies for choice. If I wish to make certain choices I must have the individual resources necessary to actualize them. For example, if I wish to go to Europe I must first somehow get together the money for a fare, or be devious enough to get there without paying (which is a resource). If I wish to learn history it helps if I have the competency of reading. Quite simply, certain choices are excluded to those who lack the individual resources to gain them. It is in this area that the school may make a great impact on enlarging the freedom of the child. Under the aegis of the school the child learns skills which ultimately may be liberating. By increasing his competencies, the schools, as a consequence, also increase the options available to the child. All things being equal, look at how much freer a child is who can read against one who can not.

It is, however, at this point that we confront the dilemma of the schools in regard to freedom. The child is denied free direction of his own life for twelve years so that with the acquisition of certain competencies and skills he might eventually become freer. He is, in a sense, placed in a form of bondage so that he might eventually be free. The dilemma becomes clear. The fundamental belief underlying freedom - that a person can make significant choices in his own life - may be weakened. For while in the school environment, all too often, others have decided what is significant and worthwhile for the child. It is difficult to learn to be free if the child has little opportunity to practice making significant choices. The very belief and attitude of freedom ordinarily does not nurture well in such soil.

The schools must grab the horns of this dilemma. As teachers the task we must keep in the forefront of our pursuits is to enlarge the students competencies and horizons and yet permit opportunity for significant choice.

## IV. ANTECEDENTS OF FREEDOM

I am suggesting that freedom is not a given. It is not a quality that is inherently present in each of us. Nor is it a quality that exists by mere social proclamation and by the granting of rights and privileges. Freedom rests upon the belief and attitude that one can make and actualize choices. And freedom is further extended by the means, competencies, and talents that the individual may put into service. Belief and competencies are learned. It follows then that the capacity to be free can be learned.

At this point let us enlarge our working definition of freedom to emphasize a characteristic that has up to now only been implied - that of aware choice. Freedom becomes then the capacity to choose with awareness and to actualize this choice. Joseph Church (1961) in his significant work Language and the Discovery of Reality distinguishes between two major modes of perception and behavior. "The first mode is what is called participation, where we respond organismically in an unmediated, reflex - like way to the dynamic, affective . . . properties of the environment. The second is contemplative perception, where action is suspended in favor of inspection, judgment, and analysis."

In the participation mode, the individual is claimed by the immediacy of his environment. He has no choice but to respond as the situation seemingly impels. The awareness of the possibility of choice is just non-existent. On the other hand, the contemplative mode permits the greatest range of aware choice. The person has detached himself from the powerful valancies of his immediate surroundings. He has surveyed and evaluated the situation. He has analyzed possible options. His choice is mediated by time and by thought, and is therefore a genuine choice. The participant orientation is characteristic of very young children and many of the children before described as survivors.

If the schools are to enlarge the individual's scope of freedom they must first recognize the antecedents of his freedom - that is, preconditions of his becoming free. One of these antecedents is the child's capacity for mediated action. Consideration before activity. What is necessary is the encouragement in the child of those characteristics Church describes as contemplative over those of the participative. With the powers of mediated thought the environment ceases to be a compelling controller of the child's attention, but instead becomes a ground for the actualization of choice. The child gains a vastly improved position in that rather than merely reacting to the seeming pull of his environment, he may survey his situation, ignore the irrelevant, and focus upon those elements which serve his goals. If he does not develop this capacity of mediation he becomes an inmate of his environment.

Closely related is another antecedent to freedom, the ability to delay impulse and defer immediate gratification of needs. The child of the survivor pattern frequently can not delay the immediate fulfillment of his needs. His environment is not perceived in all its richness, but instead only as a backdrop for the satisfaction of his compelling needs. Immediate gratification of impulse does not permit the individual direction of his own life. It makes him oblivious to the possibilities residing within himself and his world.

The teacher who is aware of these antecedents of freedom; and who aids and supports the child in his movement from immature to more mature modes of behavior; and who brings the child to a point where he can control his impulse and postpone gratification permits a perspective which appreciates the promise of the future. A perspective

which further allows the child the choice of whether he wishes to participate in the immediate environment and if so to determine what fashion that participation will take. The immediate environment ceases to impose itself upon him.

How I wish I could agree with John Holt and other educational naturalists who maintain that all the child really needs in order to be free is to be placed in a free classroom environment on his own mettle and resource. He would then become an instant encounterer. I wish I could agree but I can not. Some children arrive at school as encounterers and as we've mentioned there is an unfortunate environmental press to make adjusters of them. The prescription for such children is to encourage their bent, to entrust them with much of their own education, and to support and challenge them. Too, their exists a great need to invest the adjuster with greater amounts of self-direction. It is, however, the needs and condition of the survivor that Holt does not dulty recognize. This child if placed in a free environment with little intervention would not suddenly become liberated. He if any thing would be worse off, for then there would be no resistance to his self-defeating patterns. We would not see the survivor transformed into a curious, happy explorer. These are children who actually possess a fear of new experience. With them, as Shirley Cohen (1968) aptly states, "coping does not always mean a direct path toward higher and more mature levels of functioning."

No, there are preconditions to freedom and John Holt's prescription for non-intervention and non-direction would result in a great disservice to those children who are bound by internal constraints. Constraints that are translated into rigid, unaware, and impulsive behavior. Behavior which may be bound in a very narrow manner to the immediate environment.

Recognition of the antecendents of freedom permits the teacher to more adequately assess the child's need with the end of self-direction.

## V. FREEDOM, KNOWLEDGE, AND THE TEACHER

A statement is in order about the relationship between knowledge and freedom. It is almost banal to say to "know is to be free." If I know, I am more aware, and in this increased awareness I have greater choice. Many critics of the schools among them John Holt, Paul Goodman, and Herbert Kohl have brought into question the desirability of introducing to the child any knowledge which does not emanate directly from him. Paul Goodman (1969) states: "It seems stupid to decide a priori what the young ought to know and then try to motivate them, instead of letting the initiative come from them..."

This particular concept of education strikes me as constraining rather than enriching. It deprives the teacher of an active role in meeting and challenging his students. If we exclusively follow Holt's (1969) suggestion of just giving "children as much help and guidance as they need and ask for . . . and then get out of their way" it strips, in Buber's terms, much of the "thouness" of the teacher. The teacher is reduced to merely a waiting and watching option to be plucked at an appropriate time by the student. But as Buber (1958) has said in his I and Thou "all real living is meeting", it would then follow that authentic education is a process of two persons - teacher and student - meeting.

Maurice Friedman (1960) in talking about the teacher-student relationship stated: "Only a philosophy of dialogue makes possible an adequate picture of what does...take place: the pupil grows through his encounter with the person of the teacher...In this encounter the reality which the teacher...presents to him comes alive for him: it is transformed from the potential, the abstract, and the unrelated

to the actual, concrete, and present immediacy of a personal and... reciprocal relationship. This means that no real learning takes place unless the pupil participates, but it also means that the pupil must encounter something really 'other' than himself before he learns.

It is not a matter of keeping out of the student's way as Holt suggests, it is rather a question of the spirit and orientation the teacher brings to his meeting with his student. Is he perceiving and experiencing the uniqueness of the student - his world, his needs, his present moment - and is he then challenging the student to go beyond this point of knowing and being? Is he creating a tension between the moment and the student's ability to create the next moment? Does he open the door to other worlds the student might not otherwise confront without him? And with this, is he opening up his personal world to the student? Here is a teacher who is not controlling the student's life, not pumping in knowledge which is not pertinent to the child, not a spectator of the child's life. But, instead, an active human being sharing his perspective with his student, bringing out the talents and promise of the child, while challenging the child to encounter new horizons.

Holt (1967) in his influential book How Children Fail has held that knowledge thought to be important becomes obsolete or useless soon after it has been learned. He cautions about the child encountering this sort of knowledge in this way: "The child who remembered everything he learned in school would live his life believing many things that were not so."

Holt's stand on the encountering of knowledge was viewed by Sam McCracken (1970) as "curiously absolutist." For Holt would want the

knowledge to be perfected before it is introduced - that is, not capable of being modified by new experience. Holt however realized that this perfecting was not possible, and his response was to admonish against preselecting any knowledge for student encounter. Yet, David Krech (1969) has suggested that most knowledge - not merely that which is preselected - is partial and incomplete. Krech goes on to say that "much of the knowledge we acquire - whether through experience or formal education - is simply wrong." In other words both preselected and informal experiential knowledge are fraught with many of the same difficulties.

The emphasis then should not be placed upon the perfectibility of knowledge. The emphasis should be instead upon the honesty and openness that we bring to encounters with the student. In their encounters the teacher and student should view knowledge as provisional and not as static. Their model of the world should be open and responsive to new experience. Some knowledge is more reliable and less likely to change than other knowledge. But none is perfect and none is perfectible.

What is being said here, is that knowledge generated out of the meeting between teacher and student is necessary and freedom enhancing. As Jerome Bruner (1962) has written "the guarantee against limits is the sense of alternatives." Knowledge about and from the world developed through the shared perspectives of teacher and student provides such alternatives.

In line with this, the attitude and belief the individual holds that he can make and actualize choices is strengthened by the recognition that events and phenomena can be known and that regularities of experience may be discerned and organized. For then the individual can depend upon his

experience and learning as representing reliable guides for future decision making. He will learn that he can affect things; and that his actions have certain consequences. Feedback can be placed against his framework of knowledge about the world and be meaningfully evaluated. Let me go further and suggest that knowledge of the constancies of experience aids the child in his approach to the unknown and uncertainties of life; that as he realizes that much of his world is open to his understanding, he will gain trust in his capacity to confront that which he does not yet understand.

## VI. FREEDOM AND IMAGINATION

Thinking, encountering, and knowing become fostering processes of freedom. Another ingredient should be briefly introduced into our discussion - that of imagination. Lev Shestov - the Russian existential thinker who has not enjoyed the audience he deserves - distinguishes between thinking and reasoning. Reasoning he notes is too sequential, too tied down to the task of objectively understanding what now exists. Reasoning holds in check and in time destroys the power of imagination. Thinking to Shestov (1966) "means the relinquishing of logic" and its replacement with imagination. For Shestov only imagination of all man's faculties is equipped to deal with the major problems of the individual's existence. For imagination can best deal with what is not. To Shestov education should be "the art which aims at breaking down the logical continuity of argument and brings man out on the shoreless sea of imagination where everything is possible." Restraints of the environment and the bounds of necessity are not recognized, as the individual can envision any course of action and any world view he likes. Only when he forgets the so-called "laws"-given or derived from experience- can the individual be free.

As Shestov's view is situated by the one we have been discussing a tension develops. Unlike Shestov what is held here is that the seeking and understanding of the regularities and constancies of our world are important in the actualization of choice, and that they need not choke - off imagination. Shestov, however, reminds us that honest search and discovery of this world is not enough. What is further required is the creation of new worlds.

## VII. CONCLUSION

The emphasis of tonight's discussion has been upon the encouragement of freedom in the child. Recognition of the components and antecedents of freedom have underscored my belief that freedom is a learned quality and that the teacher must foster and encourage it; furthermore, that some come to the school not as aware, exploring and free youngsters but as children who are rigid, bound, and afraid. And the teacher's responsibility here is to actively reach out and support the child while modifying the child's behavior toward the end of greater self-direction. Further, the teacher in his dealings with all children is not as an option in the child's classroom environment, but an interactive, concerned human being meeting with another human - the child. The teacher's purpose is at all times

to challenge the student and to create tension

For tension is inherent in education and in choice. What the individual is opposes what he might be. What he is doing opposes what might be done. An option selected creates a new state of being and all of the risks and uncertainties that go with it. An option selected entails a rejection of other possible states of being. And in this sense every actualized choice expresses a movement away from present being.

We have talked about the place of knowledge in providing the child a framework for making and evaluating choice. We have mentioned the need for detachment from the immediacy of environmental presses and of mediation of time and thought in enlarging the range of aware choice.

And finally we talked briefly of Shestov's cautions about the deadening effects that reason may have on imagination. To Shestov imagination was a forebear of free thought and action; only imagination could transcend the limits of the given world.

There is a need to transcend the parameters of the immediate, yet to preserve an appreciation of and joy in the present moment. A need to encourage tension between the acknowledgement of the constancies and regularities of our world and the belief that the individual can create his own pathways, his own life, his own world - that nothing is impossible. Can the school achieve the balance necessary to stimulate and nurture this type of freedom? By balanced I do not mean by walking a middle line, but rather by recognizing the demands of life, the need of reason, the areas of the unknown, and encouraging the student to understand these, and yet challenging the student's will to transcend them. Can the school achieve this balance? I do not know. Yet I would like to see us try. You know, we have never really tried.

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